

# **Needham Human Rights Committee Minutes**

**December 19, 2013 7:30 PM**

## **Broadmeadow School Conference Room**

Present: Amelia Klein, Olly Harari, Cynthia Ganung, Abdul Cader Asmal, Ashok Mehta  
Mike Vaughn

Recorder: Cynthia Ganung

The meeting was chaired by co-chair Amelia Klein

**1. Minutes** of the Oct. 17, 2013 meeting were approved.

**2. Old Business:**

### **November 21 Event: Spotlight on Human Rights**

Feedback: Members thought the presentation by the speaker was very good and there was good opportunity for interaction. The turnout was small, especially considering the excellent publicity in local newspapers and the Globe, which included information about the speaker. We discussed what we can do to attract more people to these educational events. Families will come when their children are in an event. A specific human rights issue that is related to a current event attracts more people than a general discussion of human rights. More people attend when the HRC cosponsors a program with groups like the League of Women Voters or the Newton Human Rights Commission. It was felt that it is important to sponsor these events even if not many people attend.

**Committee Membership:** John Bullian, Board of Selectman contact with the Human Rights Committee suggested waiting awhile to meet with the new director of the Needham Housing Authority. She could be asked to suggest tenants who might want to join the HRC. Penny Kirk, director of resident services might also be invited to come to the meeting.

**Library Grant:** The Needham Free Public Library is sponsoring the program "Created Equal: Americas Civil Rights Struggle" - a series of documentary films and community discussions. The HRC was consulted about people to invite to be on the panel of the discussion about the film "The Freedom Riders" (will be shown Sat. March 22). The discussion will be on Sun. March 30 at 2pm. HRC members Sandra Walters and Ashok Mehta will be on the panel. It was clarified that each panel member will speak for him or herself, not the HRC. It was suggested that there be outreach to the community to encourage people who were part of the civil rights movement in Needham or the south to participate in this program.

**Webpage:** Ashok reported that Sandy Cincotta, (support services manager) responded to his proposal about the website. The HRC website has to be part of the town website. It is ok to have the logo. Contact information for the chairs can be included, but not personal information, such as individual bios. The HRC can say what we are like as a group and have a group photo, but not individual ones. The webpage can include an introduction, history of the HRC, current and past events, information about the meetings and an invitation to attend. The committee is appreciative of the time and effort Ashok contributed to reviewing the webpage.

### **3. Reports:**

**MLK Day Event:** Jan. 20, 10-noon, Needham High School. Refreshments and conversation at 9:30am. Members volunteered to help with requesting and picking up donations of food and beverages from Needham businesses. Help will also be needed for setup and cleanup. Cynthia will coordinate. The HRC display and brochures will be at the event.

**Diversity Summit:** The next summit might be at a different time of year, maybe March. It will stay at Pollard where the principal and place were experienced as welcoming. They are considering changes in the program and looking for ways to team with others in the community, making diversity relevant to different groups and encouraging networking.

**Meeting with Selectman John Bullian:** The co-chairs Marlene and Amelia met twice with John Bullian to discuss the role of the Human Rights committee, such as responding to complaints. Marlene presented the responsibilities that HRC have in different towns. John consulted Dan Mathews who said that the Needham HRC role is limited to education and community awareness. Complaints should be sent to the Selectman through Sandy Cincotta. Mike recalled that in the past the HRC had trained mediators who responded to complaints. It is not possible to have that role now because of legal issues. HRC can collaborate with other groups (eg. School, council on aging, disabilities, housing authority, etc.) on common concerns.

**Letter from a Needham resident:** A letter was received at the Town Hall. It is being investigated and might be discussed at a future meeting

**Letter from James Hugh Powers:** He wrote to the HRC expressing concern about how immigrant workers are treated in general and in Needham. His concerns were based on his experience with a Brazilian houseworker and an article in the Globe. James has discussed his concern with State Representative Denise Garlick and is interested in what actions can be taken. Amelia has responded to his letter and will send him information from the Immigration Justice Task Force that is actively working on the rights of domestic workers.

**Next meeting: January 16, 2014**

**Recorder: Olly**